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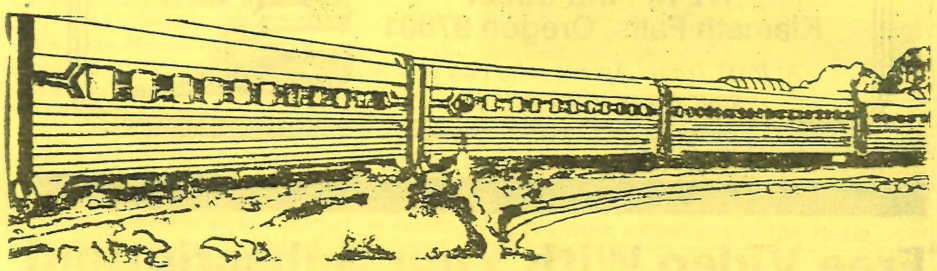

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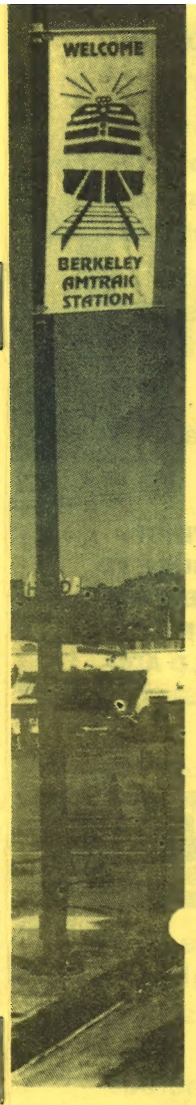

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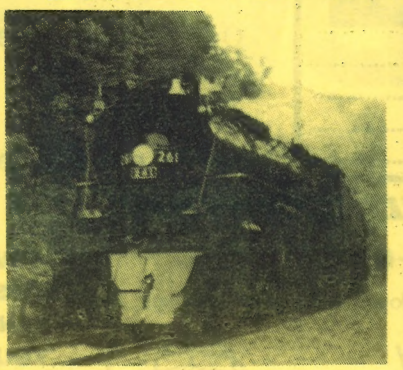

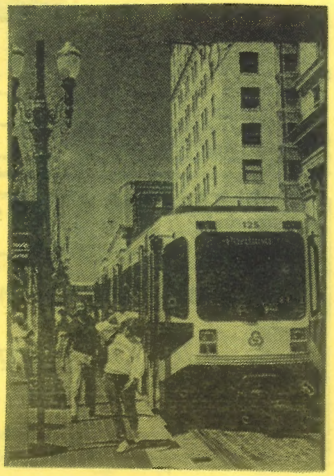

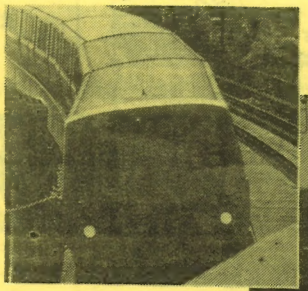

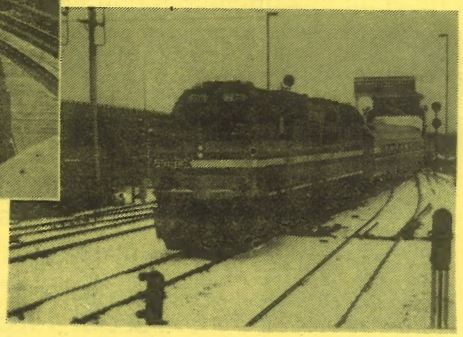

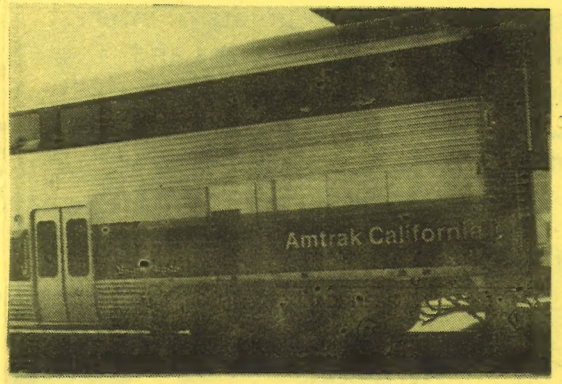

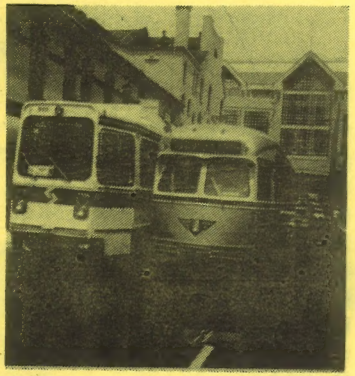

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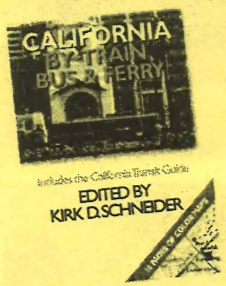

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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

ON THE COVER

Southbound Amtrak Metroliner 115 was photographed on Nov 25, 1996, the Monday before Thanksgiving, at Morrisville PA by Gene Poon.

See East Coast Report in this issue for the latest news on Northeast Corridor operations.

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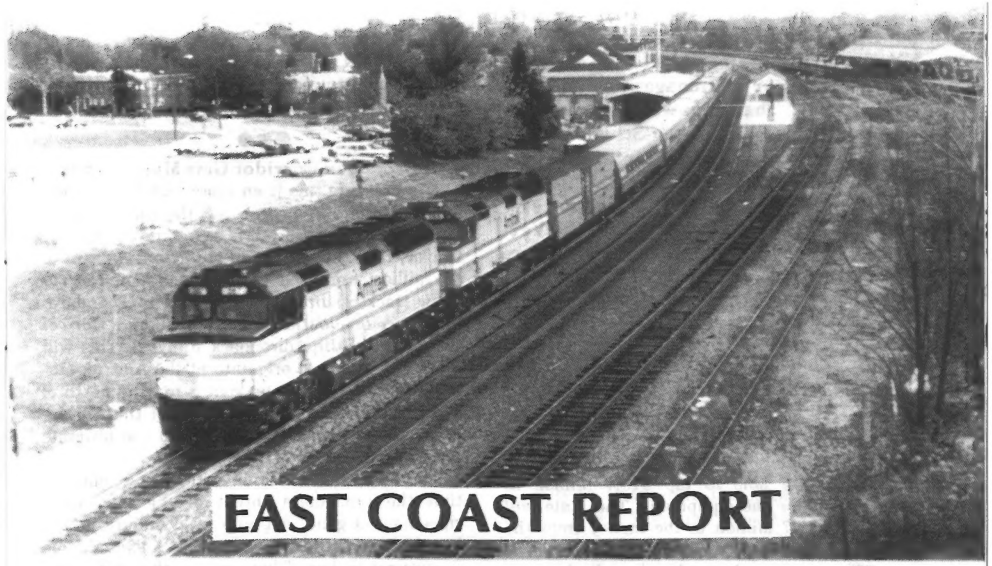


EAST COAST REPORT

The **Silver Palm** made its inaugural southbound run from NY to Miami on Nov 10, 1996. This is currently Amtrak's third Florida train. A previous Florida train, the **Palmetto**, which ran as far south as Jacksonville, was discontinued in 1995 in a round of budget cuts. The **Silver Palm** is assigned the **Palmetto**'s trains numbers, 89-90. On the **Silver Palm**'s first run it arrived at Washington Union Station about an hour late, and at the first station south of Washington, Alexandria VA, 2 ½ hours late. This is the inaugural run arriving at the Alexandria VA Amtrak station on Nov 10. The train was composed of four Amcoaches, one Amfleet café/lounge, two new Viewliner sleepers, one Heritage sleeper, one full-service diner, and two material handling cars. The engines sosuth of Washington were F40PHs 387 & 263. Photo and caption by Alex Mayes.

The **Ethan Allen** began service strongly, Amtrak said in a Jan 22 press release. Amtrak said it got off to a "roaring start" in December, far exceeding its ridership goal, with 3140 passengers rather than the predicted 2000. The train runs between NY and Rutland VT, and is the second 403-b train for Vermont.

Also, Amtrak on Jan 27 launched a daily bus connection between Rutland and Burlington, meeting the arriving and departing **Ethan Allen** trains. The new train began service Dec 2. Amtrak said that marketing of it has been targeted at skiers because of easy access from Rutland to major ski resorts, such as Killington and Okemo, and the train has benefitted from extensive marketing support from Killington. Also, the state and resort industry have arranged a convenient shuttle service.

The new train has been a boon for upstate NY, Amtrak said, as it provides Saratoga Springs and Fort Edwards/Glens Falls with a second daily roundtrip train to supplement the **Adirondack**. Schenectady also benefits with an additional round trip.

"Amtrak and the state of Vermont continue to break new ground in creating and launching new passenger rail services," said George D. Warrington, president of Amtrak's NE Corridor. "Success comes from understanding the marketplace and consistently meeting customer demand for reliable, high-quality train service."

The **Ethan Allen Express** was created by extending an Amtrak NY-Albany train north to Rutland. The service was made possible after Vermont Railway completed a $4.8 million upgrade of a 22-mile section of track it owns between Whitehall NY and Rutland. The work was financed with $3.5 million in federal funding secured through the efforts of US Sen. Jim Jeffords of VT.

The new bus connection, operated by Vermont Trailways, makes stops in Brandon, Middlebury and Vergennes. One-way fares to Rutland will be $4 from Brandon, $7 from Middlebury, $8 from Vergennes and $11 from Burlington. From Burlington, the trip takes 1hr, 40mins.

Amtrak said that the success of the **Ethan Allen** has not hurt the **Vermonter** or the **Adirondack**. Dec ridership on the former was 8831, its second strongest month of 1996 after August. **Adirondack** ridership was up over 8%; its route parallels that of

the **Ethan Allen** from Albany to Whitehall NY.

Vermonter patronage was up 24% over Dec 1995. That train was created in Apr 1995 and runs Washington-St. Albans via NY and Springfield MA. It serves nine stations in VT, Claremont in NH, and Amherst MA. It has a baggage car equipped to carry skis, snowboards and bicycles. Both the **Vermonter** and **Ethan Allen Express** feature distinctive logos and made-in-Vermont onboard food selections and microbrewery beers.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge on Jan 27 signed a bill to lead to acquiring new trains for the Keystone Corridor, Harrisburg-Philadelphia. It authorizes the state to enter into a labor protection contract with Amtrak and other union employees, a contract necessary to be able to tap $18.7 million in federal funds for the equipment. The state will contribute $4.67 million to the money from the FTA.

The trains will be diesel multiple units (DMUs), 2-4 cars each, of self-propelled cars with top speed of 110mph. The present corridor maximum speeds are 55-90mph. The DMUs will offer, the state promises, food service, computer hookups and new handicapped accommodations. They might be running by late summer, 1999. Some "preview" equipment might be available by spring 1998, the Governor's office said. Amtrak will operate the trains, which will be owned by Pennsylvania.

Metro-North has a goal of 96.5% ontime performance for 1997, the commuter railroad said at the end of Jan. At that time, its actual performance so far this year was 97.8%. For the week ending Jan 26, the Hudson Line had 98.6%, Harlem Line 99.1%, New Haven Line 97.7%, and the system 98.4%.

On Feb 1 Metro-North stopped accepting personal checks for ticket sales on board trains. It still accepts them at ticket offices. M-N said that such sales on trains slow down conductors and make for inefficient revenue collection due to the extra administrative effort required.

Amtrak's northbound Adirondack, train 69 on Jan 24 was annulled and passengers transferred to train 281 after becoming nearly 3 hours late due to repeated overheating and stalling of engine 704, a P32AC-DM model.

Hyde Park NY Town Board on Jan 13 agreed to support a plan that lays the groundwork for Metro-North to extend service north from Poughkeepsie to Hyde Park and on to Rhinecliff. The town's move was to send a letter to Gov. Pataki and a state senator urging them to support M-N's capital plan, which includes $3 million for an environmental impact statement on the proposed expansion. The former NY Central train station in Hyde Park has been preserved by the Hudson Valley RR Society for its headquarters. M-N expects rail travel on the northern Hudson Line to increase 88% by 2014, and the extension to generate nearly 1 million trips.

●●●

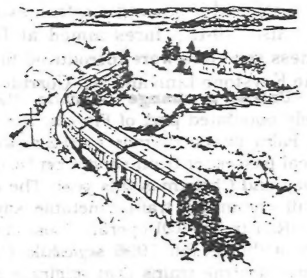
Adirondack Corridor Gets Major Grant

Pressure has been placed on NY politicians and others to ensure that the rail line from Utica to Lake Placid NY is saved in its entirety. In Nov, these efforts began to pay off. A grant of $5 million from the state was announced, to allow track restoration from Utica to Thendara, a distance of about 35 miles, and about a third of the length of the Adirondack Railway. This will allow operations to originate at the Amtrak station in Utica. The future goal is to head north of Thendara directly into the heart of the Adirondack Mountains, with Lake Placid the ultimate terminus.

With this state investment, it appears that the immediate threat of the line being ripped up is gone. A group in Thendara in the late 1980s decided the railroad was too valuable a resource to lose. They argued that NY State would never allow a superhighway to penetrate the area, and that a rail line would be a natural. Properly marketed, it could be a major success story, and their first priority was to keep the rails from being torn up.

By the early 1990s, limited passenger service from Thendara, about 35 miles north of Utica, was instituted, using a diesel and a couple of clerestory-roof coaches from the former CN commuter service in Montreal. Its popularity has steadily increased. The main long-term objective was to get the entire railroad back into service. In the 21st Century it could be one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Eastern US. Travelers could reach Utica via Amtrak's Empire Corridor, or through service could run direct from NYC.

The line was built in the late 1890s as the Mohawk & Malone RR and almost immediately absorbed into the NY Central in 1898 after its completion. The railway was to allow travelers to journey into the Adirondacks, among the East's highest mountains. Here are located many lakes carved out by glaciers, and other wonders where hotels and spas were established. Many catered to wealthy NYC residents who often arrived in private railcars. At points such as Lake Placid, Saranac and Tupper Lake there were special sidings to accommodate the cars. The trip from Grand Central to Utica took about 3hrs, after which trains proceeded slowly along the single-track line, called the Adirondack Division. Connections also existed to permit trains to move across the US-Canadian border north of Lake Placid and travel 50 or so more miles to Montreal. This link was intact until severed in the early 1960s. In the late 1940s and early 1950s excursions and fantrips would proceed from Albany to Montreal this way and return via


Adirondack Railway

the Delaware & Hudson Rwy, now used by Amtrak's **Adirondack**.

In its heyday, the Adirondack Division hosted many trains, of which at least one ran through to Montreal. To cut the danger of fires, oil-burning steam locomotives, mostly "Pacifics", were used. Business was heaviest in summer, but the winter ski trade was also brisk, and many specials were run from Grand Central. It was a busy stretch of railroad, serving as a "Gateway to the Adirondacks" in the pre-auto age.

Decline began in the late 1920s and continued more or less unabated for the next thirty years. Auto use rose and many of the fashionable old resorts shut down. Minor branch lines were gradually abandoned. One important one went to Raquette Lake, and 1920s photos show many Pullmans spotted at its station. By the early 60s the NY Central ran one train a day from Utica to Lake Placid, using a single Budd RDC. Freight service was always minimal. The Budd car came off in the late 60s about the time of the Penn Central merger.

Conrail ran its last scheduled freight on the Division in the late 1970s. However, the state entered the picture because it wanted to use the tracks to bring people by train to the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, by then the route's northern terminus. The entire 118-mi line was rehabbed and passenger service with two or three daily trains began that winter. The trains ran up to 20 cars. Old coaches and full dining cars were used, all steam-heated.

After the Olympics there were plans to keep the Adirondack Railroad in operations for summer and winter tourists, but mismanagement, lack of promotion and stupidity prevailed, and service lasted only one more year. The line again reverted to nature. Proposals to convert it to a snow mobile path were voiced and a study commission to mull its fate was formed.

As of now, a valuable resource has been recognized and hopefully saved. Let's hope that by 2010 there is a schedule of trains as impressive as that on the Silverton line in Colorado.

--Bruce J. Russell.

The Vermonter ran two extra round trips in late Jan, running as an overnight train. They were prompted by two large ski groups wishing to travel, and the remainder of the trains was opened to other paying customers. The trains left Washington northbd on Jan 25 & 30 at 7:30pm, reaching St. Albans about 9am. On Jan 26 & 31 the southbd trips left St. Albans at 8:15pm, to arrive in Washington about 10am. The trains made all the usual **Vermonter** stops.

The three northernmost New England states seem in a state of excitement over the prospects of increased rail passenger service in the near future, especially east-west service to complement the north-south service that is building, including the soon-coming Boston-Portland ME service. Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are actively thinking about this possibility. "The three states should pull themselves together as a bloc," TrainRiders Northeast head Wayne Davis told the Boston Globe in Jan; "This is a regional issue that's beginning to gel. There's no reason we have to be as poor as we are."

The Northern New England Rail Passenger Authority has commissioned a study to determine where other lines would best connect with existing and planned ones to serve latent markets.

The Maine office of transportation is considering how to extend Amtrak service beyond Portland. The state now owns the old Mountain Division, leading west from Portland to the White Mountains at the extreme west of Maine, and New Hampshire owns the remainder of the line to St. Johnsbury VT, connection point with other lines.

New Hampshire also owns the Boston & Maine portion between Concord and Lebanon.

Planners are also looking at the lines owned by Iron Road Railways of Washington DC, which serve most of Maine, run to Montreal and back into Vermont. While these are mainly freight lines at present, the owners apparently are not averse to their being used for passengers.

Ski resort owners in the area are reportedly lobbying for trains to feed their businesses. One can expect increased cooperation among the three states, resulting in greater rail travel opportunities in coming years.

The Washington Metro on Jan 27 began a 6-month trial of running some trains directly from Greenbelt on the Green Line as far as Farragut North downtown, allowing Green Line riders to avoid changing trains at Fort Totten (where they would have to trans-

fer to the Red Line). The altered service is only at rush hours. On Jan 27 Gov. Glendening and other officials rode a VIP train over the altered service route.

SEPTA expanded service on the R6 line in mid-Jan, adding eight trains, including midday and evening service, the first in five years. It is mailing free tickets to some residents along the line in a novel promotion.

NYC transit officials will buy 500 buses operating on electricity and natural gas, said a Jan 29 announcement. The new $325,000 vehicles are expected to improve air quality by eliminating some diesel exhaust. It was not immediately clear how the MTA would finance the purchase.

Amtrak Smart Pass was introduced Jan 28 in the NE Corridor, cutting fares for frequent riders. It applies on all unreserved NEDirect trains Boston-Wash., all NEDirect trains in Virginia, Keystone trains, Clockers and the **Pennsylvanian** between Harrisburg, Philadelphia and NY, the **Vermonter**, and the **Carolinian** between NY and Richmond. The pass is not valid on Metroliners or reserved NEDirect trains outside Virginia. Some existing monthly passes increased by 5%. Amtrak in Dec introduced Smart Pass on its Empire Service. Smart Pass fares were priced to offer savings but do not compete with fares charged by the seven commuter railroads that use the NE Corridor. Amtrak fares are based on faster, express service and more comfortable seating, Amtrak said.

Also, 10-trip fares aimed at frequent business travelers were introduced for travel on the Keystone Line and NE Corridor.

Unless a change is made, the most densely populated part of Florida, the Miami-West Palm Beach 65-mile corridor, will have no local passenger train service on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas this year. The current Tri-Rail commuter train timetable says that no Tri-Rail trains will operate those days. Effective with the fall 1996 schedule changes, all three Amtrak trains that originate at Miami stop only to receive passengers at Hollywood, Fort Lauderdale, Deerfield Beach, Delray Beach and West Palm Beach. All three southbound Amtrak trains stop only to discharge passengers at West Palm Beach and all stations below there. —David Willing.

Virginia state legislator David Brickley has proposed that Virginia study two light rail lines for Prince William, Fairfax and Loudon Counties. One would form a long arc from Dulles Airport through Manassas to Woodbridge on the Fredericksburg VRE line, and then run north again to the Tysons Corner shopping center in Fairfax Co. It would intersect the planned Dulles transit line at the airport and at Tysons Corner. At Woodbridge the light rail would also intersect another light rail line running from Quantico to Seven Corners in Fairfax, generally parallel to I-95 & US 1. Brickley expects that the system could come close to breaking even on operating costs. He sees 2020 as a reasonable target date for a complete system, but says that planning should start now. —Steve Dunham.

RAIL CANADA

How did VIA summarize its activities in 1996? At year-end, as reported in its Jan employee newsletter, *Vialogue*, VIA noted that 1996 began with the introduction of new uniforms, and in the spring refurbished HEP-2 equipment was put into service in SW Ontario, N Quebec and N Manitoba. Then two trains, the **Skeena** and **Abitibi**, changed from night to daytime operations. In June, VIA re-introduced reservations for Economy class patrons and later those patrons in the Corridor saw their free food and beverages eliminated, improving VIA's financial picture.

VIA began test runs of the Flexliner (IC3). At Customer Services there was a "real baptism by fire" when a new management team took over and new collective agreements were signed.

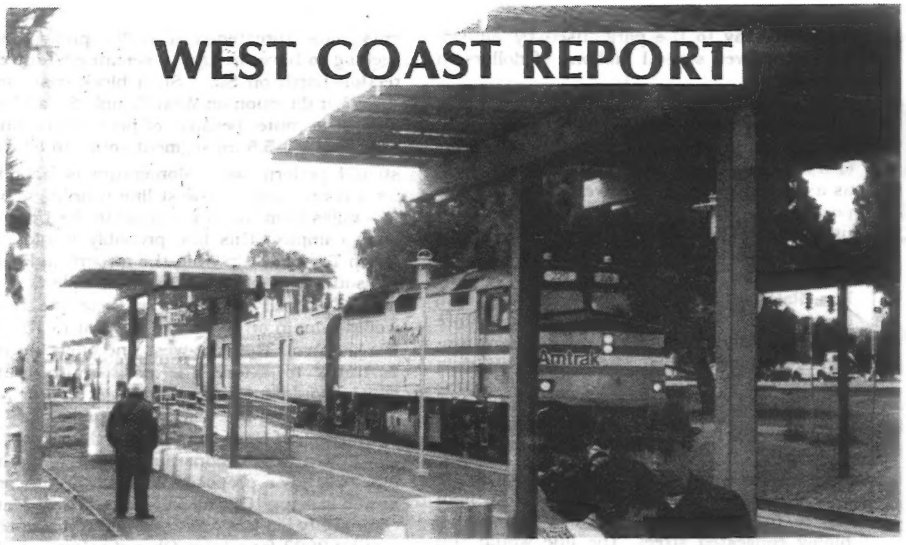
Equipment Maintenance people had a real shakeup as the Halifax, Montreal and Toronto maintenance centers were rationalized. In Marketing, the customer reward program, *VIA Préférence*, was launched in June. VIA sponsored *Good Morning America*, and there were partnerships formed with chambers of commerce in the Corridor.

VIA's strategic plan, called *Service for Success*, was launched in 1996. This, VIA said, "defines its mission, vision, values and objectives for the years to come".

VIA revenues were up nearly 3% above 1995, but about 6% below budget. Said Marketing VP Christena Sirsly, "We did fairly well considering airlines increased their revenues by only 1% domestically". Ridership was up 2% in 1996 and passenger miles up almost 4%.

Reliability of VIA's cars, defined by number of miles traveled between delays of over 5mins caused by a defect, took a nosedive in 1996: while in 1995 it was 338,024 miles, in 1996 it dropped to 194,963 miles. But locomotive reliability improved, with an increase from 42,789 miles to 38,962 miles.

WEST COAST REPORT



SAN DIEGAN at Solana Beach station Sep 30, 1996. RTN photo.

Portland leaders have suggested that the proposed North-South light rail line become a "South" line only by terminating the south leg at the existing east-west light rail tracks downtown, on Morrison and Yamhill Sts, in an effort to trim costs. An estimated $1.5 billion construction bill for a North-South route which included goodies for many political factions lost a crucial statewide vote in Nov, which would have allocated state lottery funds to the project. A North-South route extending to Union Station and over the Steel Bridge on existing tracks to the Rose Quarter (athletic pavilions) and Lloyd Center looks increasingly improbable.

Some transit advocates are urging use of the Hawthorne Bridge to cross the Willamette River (the span served old Portland Traction "interurban" Oregon City and Bellrose cars until 1958) and switching the route south of Milwaukie to Oregon City (the old PT routing) from Clackamas Town Center shopping mall to serve more passengers per mile. Adjacent-property owners along the old PT routing oppose the plan.

Meanwhile, testing of new low-floor AC motor cars continues on the West line in the Beaverton area. The West Side line is supposed to open in Sep 1998 for its full 18-mile length to Hillsboro. The West line will be through-routed with the existing 15-mile Gresham line to become a 33-mile-long east-west route.

Early in the new year, Port of Portland authorities proposed a 6-mile branch of the Gresham line north to the Portland airport, offering to pay for trackage of about 1-5 miles on airport property. Air traffic is growing rapidly in Portland, and parking/congestion problems at the airport are now issues. Tri-Met response was that no funding was possible for the proposed branch, which could be operated as a Northeast leg of the proposed South routing.

●●●

During the heavy storms of early Jan, the Northwestern Pacific RR suffered more than 20 slides, and one tunnel was closed between Eureka and Woodman CA. The damages were estimated at $5 million. In other news, The North Coast RR Authority announced Jan 20 that special excursion trains will again run in 1997. Special trains will operate on Sat & Sun starting Mar 1 between Healdsburg and Willits on Sat and between Healdsburg and Hopland on Sun, both roundtrip runs. Connecting buses will run from the Emeryville Amtrak station at 7:30am, S.F. Ferry Bldg at 7:50, and San Rafael Golden Gate terminal at 8:20. Return connecting buses run in late afternoon. Sat runs connect with the Skunk train to Ft. Bragg and allow Sun return to Willits, with bus service back to Hopland, Healdsburg and Bay Area cities. Roundtrip fare is $85 to Willits (including bar-b-q lunch, or $150 in dome car (including sitdown diner lunch). Senior (>65) rates are available. Bus connections cost $15. The reservation phone is 800-550-2122 (Sonoma county) or 888-473-3966 (SF Bay Area).

The San Joaquins continue to lose Yosemite business, as the national park remains closed, since Jan 2, due to massive valley flooding. Reopening will not be before sometime in March, the longest period the park has ever been closed. Some higher-elevation ski areas in the park have reopened. The

main highway to the park, used by Amtrak buses, received several millions of dollars in damage.

The park closure has rekindled the debate over improving the park environment by moving unnecessary structures and vehicles out of the valley. Environmentalists see it as a rare opportunity to move forward on proposals that were made 17 years ago, while as usual money is a problem with park administrators. The total cost of restoring damaged park facilities is estimated at over $175 million. Rather than restore them, why not take the opportunity to eliminate some and restore some of the natural park features, environmentalists ask (see also *Quotes of the Week* in this issue). It seems certain that when the park does fully reopen, there will be fewer overnight accommodations than before.

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Some Berkeley CA city council members are backing a proposal to restore light rail to the College Ave corridor, a two-lane, highly congested street. The line would run from the Univ. of Calif. campus south to the Rockridge BART station, a short distance into the Oakland city limits. Supporters apparently hope to tap University funds earmarked for traffic alleviation as a sporting facility is enlarged. The cost estimate is $11 million for two miles of light rail line.

Amtrak California in Feb began radio ads for a companion-rides-free promotion for its short-distance trains. Similar to earlier ads they feature a soft female voice saying, "Are you ready?.It's time to go. It's time to take the train..." The promotion runs through Mar 31.

BART will meet with San Francisco airport and airline officials Feb 13 at the request of SF Mayor Willie Brown and US Senator Dianne Feinstein to settle differences over the BART airport extension plan. United Airlines and the Air Transport Association have been trying to shoot down the $1.2 billion plan because they object to BART's asking for airline funding for some of the project's cost. The dispute has been threatening the project at the federal level, and involving Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) who called the BART request a type of extortion.

Greyhound buses service moved to the Pasco WA Amtrak station Nov 1 and the result was immediately evident: bus passengers are messy. One Amtrak source told RTN that up to 45 passengers for the **Empire Builder** can wait in the station for #28, and after the train has pulled out, the waiting room is "clean". Just a few bus passengers and the depot is a mess, RTN was told.

Move is afoot in Salt Lake City to reverse a decision to place north-south light rail tracks on Main St south of the big LDS temple, a major downtown landmark. Opponents have threatened a ballot proposition, seeking to have the tracks separated—one direction north on State St. a block east, and the other direction on West Temple St, a block west. The route, because of pronounced linearity on the 15.5-mi segment south to Sandy, should perform well. Momentum is building for a connecting east-west line running about 10+ miles from the airport east to the Univ. of Utah campus. This line probably would use North Temple St in from the airport and then jog south one block to South Temple St just east of the UP depot. From there the route would remain on S. Temple at least to 1300-E (E. 13th Ave). The east-west line offers an opportunity to extend the north-south route, which would increase patronage on the N-S line by offering one-seat rides from Sandy to both the U. of Utah campus and the airport.

Meanwhile, consultants are preparing bids to study a proposed Wasatch Front Commuter rail line Ogden-Salt Lake-Provo. Many community leaders want such a service operating by 2002 for winter Olympic Games to be held in ski areas southeast of Salt Lake City.

BNSF tried to bypass the slide-prone main line alongside Puget Sound between Seattle and Everett by running some freights north from Renton via Bellevue and Woodinville to Snohomish, a junction on the Stevens Pass route. The effort ceased when a westbd derailed on the old track (ex-NP Sumas line). After that, BNSF planned to operate diverted Stevens Pass and north-south traffic eastbd via the reopened (as of Dec 7) Stampede Pass route and westbd via the Columbus River line (ex-SP&S) through Wishram to Vancouver WA and then north to Seattle—putting an enormous strain on the single-track ex-NP line Pasco-Spokane. Cars too large for the Stampede Tunnel were to operate eastbd against the current of traffic, via Wishram. These moves greatly added to congestion on the **Empire Builder**'s Spokane-Pasco-Portland leg.

Although 9-hr delays due to cold weather on **Empire Builder** runs can be common in winter, a new record may have been set with the westbd train due into Portland Jan 17 which arrived over 27hrs late (and included the Seattle cars diverted because of landslides near Seattle).

San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission early in Jan called for bids for two locomotives at about $1.7 million each for the planned Altamont Pass commuter rail line.

The Los Angeles MTA and a construction firm were battling in court at the end of Jan over a 1994 subway tunnel construction explosion that injured three workers, one of them requiring over $2 million in medical treatment.

An annual poll reported by the San Francisco Chronicle in Jan found transportation to be the no. 1 concern in the Bay Area.

Devoted rail advocate Byron Nordberg in So. Calif. died of cancer Jan 30.

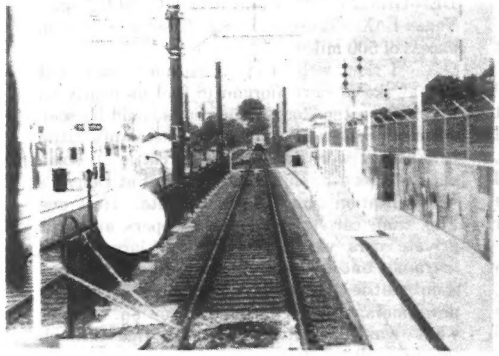
MIDWEST REPORT

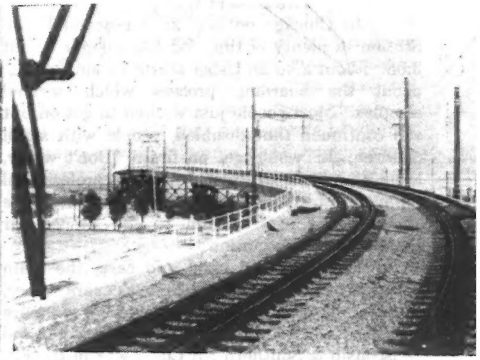
CLEVELAND'S ELECTRIC TRANSIT: A PHOTO ESSAY BY DON SCOTT

Above: Two photos of the Cleveland RTA yard. Both heavy-rail and light-rail vehicles on Greater Cleveland RTA system pick up power from overhead trolley wire.

Below left: A Breda light rail vehicle at the east end of the Cleveland Waterfront line, beyond South Harbor station.

Below right: The long, steep, curving LRT bridge over the Conrail main line on Cleveland's Waterfront extension, photographed last Aug 21.





Missouri will see a Flexliner demonstration between St. Louis and Kansas City Apr 8-May 1, said a Jan 31 Amtrak press release. Amtrak and the state DOT will operate the Danish-built train in cooperation with manufacturer Adtranz. (For photos of the train, see RTN 553.)

The self-propelled train will be on display in St. Louis on Apr 5, in Kansas City Apr 6 and Jefferson City Apr 7. More display dates will be announced later.

Amtrak gave the following info on riding the train: "Reservations and a surcharge in addition to regular coach tickets will be required to ride the Flexliner, which will operate in place of the Kansas City-St. Louis **Moles** (trains 301 & 306). The Flexliner will run six days a week, with conventional Amtrak equipment operating on Wednesdays.

"Two classes of service will be offered: Custom Class and Flexliner Club Class. As on other Amtrak trains in the Midwest, Custom Class Service is a $7 surcharge in each direction on regular coach tickets and includes complimentary beverages. Flexliner Club Class is a $12 surcharge in each direction on regular coach tickets and includes superior seating and complimentary beverages.

"Round trip fares on the Flexliner between St. Louis and Kansas City will range from $66 for Custom Class to $76 for Flexliner Club Class. Shorter distances will cost less, the surcharges are mandatory and reservations are required."

Jack Hynes, a state DOT official, said "We would like to thank the Missouri legislature for the funds to support this project. This is one of the fastest growing passenger routes in the Amtrak system and this kind of equipment can show our

(continued on page 19)

Cross-Country By Endangered Trains

By Walter E. Zullig, Jr.

My plan to attend a conference in Chicago evolved into a full transcontinental trip when the announcement was made that the **Desert Wind** and **Pioneer** were to be discontinued Nov 10, 1996. I had never ridden the UP routes between Salt Lake City and the junction with the Santa Fe at Daggett CA, and between Portland OR and Ogden UT. A late evening call to Amtrak booked the entire trip without problem.

The Desert Wind

In Chicago on Sep 28 I reached Union Station in plenty of time for #35's departure at 3:05. About 2:40 an Usher started a long speech about the boarding process which seemed complex. Most people just wanted to get on but she continued that disabled, people with small children, etc., would get on first. "Don't worry, there's a seat for everyone." A very professional conductor stationed himself just inside the gate and directed each patron to the proper car depending on destination.

Following the head end cars, the train had a transition sleeper, three sleepers, diner, Sightseer lounge, three coaches, two more sleepers for Denver and four private cars lettered "Wisconsin & Southern RR Co." I was in the 8th car from the rear, surrounded by senior citizen couples enroute to Las Vegas; indeed, 2/3 of the coach passengers seemed destined to Vegas. Many of them hardly ever left their seats and had packed sufficient food for the entire trip! They were quiet so I slept well both nights.

Quite a few freights, many with foreign power, as well as some commuter trains were passed between Chicago and Aurora. Train #6 passed west of Naperville, about an hour late. My tablemates at dinner were a lady from the Detroit area and a couple from Cleveland, all headed for Vegas. The Cleveland couple were surprised over my knowledge of their city; they had used the new Waterfront Line a few times and deemed it "a gold mine for RTA". Soon we were crossing the Mississippi River bridge into the ex-Burlington Railroad's namesake city.

This trip provided my first experience with Amtrak's new "smoke stop" policy on Western long distance trains. Since smoking is prohibited on board, passengers are allowed off for a smoke wherever the train stops for 5 minutes or more. Some use the stops for a "photo op"; others for mere leg stretching. Our first was Galesburg, IL. Upon completion of the station work the conductor radios the engineer: "Give us the whistle," whereupon 4 blasts are sounded as the all aboard signal. This procedure is repeated at countless locations and now seems to be standard procedure on the Western trains. I also noticed that crew districts now are much longer than on previous trips. Train 35's two conductors operated CHI-Omaha, Omaha-DEN, DEN-Grand Jct. , Grand Jct.-SLC, SLC-Vegas, Vegas-LAX. These are long distances, some in excess of 500 miles.

I slept well in my Superliner coach seat and awoke at Fort Morgan to find us nearly on time. Soon the Rocky Mountains could be seen on the horizon and we passed some empty cattle pens which were full of mooing cattle on some earlier trips over this route. Arrival at Denver's Union Station came just 5mins late. Here one F40, mail car, the two rear sleepers and four private cars were removed. A large crowd detrained but just as many boarded and the crew spent a little time hunting for seats for all the newcomers. We departed Denver on time on what was a beautiful day for a ride through (not around) the Rockies.

Deciding to put the Sightseer lounge to good use, I reached it in time to claim one of the last seats. More "ohhs" and "ahhs" were heard as the scenery gradually unfolded. The ride was nice but at this point I really was wishing for a good old fashioned dome! The Train Chief made several announcements to prepare everyone for our passage through Moffat Tunnel. The conductor then advised of a "change of plans" in that we would have to await an eastbound coal train which was enroute. The wait was not long but after it passed we moved a short distance to the East Portal only to wait 35 minutes, perhaps to allow the tunnel ventilators to do their job. The priority accorded the coal train made us an hour late by Winter Park. About here I started to notice that the S's on the SP's no trespassing signs had been painted over with a yellow U to designate the new owner.

Lunch was with a young woman with two children about 4 and 6, enroute from Boston to Salt Lake City. She warned me that I'd be sorry but the choice was the Steward's, not mine. Having had kids of my own I thought it would be alright but I was wrong. The kids were the "Dennis the Menace" type and I sometimes felt like Mr. Wilson.

Back to the lounge after lunch to further enjoy the Rockies. Around Glenwood Springs the trees were changing color--lots of orange and yellow tints which people thought were aspens. The train continued to lose time to the point where we were nearly 2 hours late at Helper. Nearly everything we passed were coal trains. The two ladies in front of me were traveling to Provo and continually asked the attendant, conductor and Train Chief to be sure to get them off there. I dozed off after leaving Helper at 10:15 and woke up briefly at Salt Lake City when two persons came up the aisle and sat down where the Provo ladies had been. Glad they made it OK!

The one hour Salt Lake stop must have been curtailed and we departed the ex D&RGW station only 53 minutes late. Just after leaving I spotted a large illuminated UP shield and some of the city's wide streets. Shortly we entered the UP and I dropped off to sleep for the rest of the night.

I slept even more soundly this second night and was awakened just before sunrise by overhearing the man seated behind me marveling at the beautiful scenery. Indeed, we were traversing Nevada's Delamar Mountains with their many interesting rock formations. About an hour later civilization came into view in the form of houses and roads. Soon the Vegas skyline appeared; when announcing the station, the conductor urged the leg stretchers to not enter the casino. "Most people who do get carried away and have a 2-3 day wait for the next train." About 2/3 of the riders detrained here, many of them senior citizens. Almost as many boarded, most of them a younger set enroute to L.A. The station is built into the Union Plaza Hotel. It's modern but small and contains a direct walkway into the casino/hotel. Years ago I had heard stories of slot machines in the UP station; would have tried them but there were none in the Amtrak building and I heeded the conductor's advice about entering the casino!

Departure from Las Vegas came exactly one hour, 11 minutes late at 9:31 AM. Soon we were away from civilization once again, running through desert country, some of which was scenic. Meeting an eastbound stack train at Cima resulted in an 8-minute delay; several other freights were in sidings awaiting our passage. The **Desert Wind** entered ATSF trackage at Daggett at 12:39 PM after which I walked to the diner for an uneventful lunch.

We remained 1 hour, 11 minutes late at the historic station and Harvey House in Barstow which is in the restoration process. After lunch I adjourned to the Sightseer Lounge to view the trip through Cajon Pass. BNSF has erected a chain link fence with barbed wire top and floodlights on both sides of the right-of-way starting about 2 miles east of Summit and extending to the grade crossing there. Enroute we passed a rent-a-cop security car within the fenced-in area. This gives the impression of passing a prison or the boarder of an Eastern European nation in the Iron Curtain days. The railroad installed it as a result of two runaway trains on Cajon; unfortunately the established cause of one was someone's closing an angle cock while the train was stopped in this area waiting for a signal. We passed several UP and BNSF freights in the Cajon area.

The smoke stop at San Bernardino gave me the opportunity to photograph a Metrolink commuter train awaiting its departure for L.A. Imagine commuter trains in the L.A. area and 60 miles out at that! Soon we entered another segment of new trackage for me--the ATSF line from San Berdoo to Fullerton. My several previous trips through this area had been via Pasadena. Quite a few detrained at Fullerton, many enroute to points on the San Diego line. Since the connection had been missed, the conductor announced the time of the next train.

Shortly after Fullerton we halted at CP Basta awaiting a southbound Metrolink train. We needed to switch to the southbound track to run past a northbound freight doing some local switching. The stop was just opposite a complex where an aunt of mine had lived until several years ago. Quite a lot of freight as well as some Metrolink traffic was encountered between Fullerton and L.A. so we had some slowdowns and stops enroute. Our **Desert Wind** arrived LAUS at 4:45 PM, one hour 10 minutes late.

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The Pioneer

Seattle, October 5: Today I started my 2 1/2 day trip to Chicago on the **Pioneer.** Since I had a companion as far as Denver, we took a deluxe bedroom for that part of the trip. From there I had an economy bedroom the rest of the way to Chicago.

We hoped to catch a trackless trolley to the station but the first vehicle going there was a bus so we hopped on for the free ride in the downtown zone. King Street Station was rather full when we got there shortly after 7 AM. Good crowds were on hand for the Vancouver Talgo, due out at 7:45 as well as our **Pioneer,** #26, due out at 7:30. The conductors were at a desk issuing boarding passes for the Vancouver train but our train could be boarded when announced about 7:15.

Our room was set up with a table, tablecloth, flowers and two **Pioneer** wine goblets, a bottle of wine and two snack packs. A nice, first class touch. However, there was little need for the snack packs in view of the more than ample meals provided. Our consist out of Seattle was two F40's, one MHC, two

(continued on page 14)

Finding Steam In Mexico: #2 Meets #2

By John J. Harmon

For several years, High Iron Travel Corp. has been sponsoring a series of rail tours of Mexico. These tours, which are designed to appeal to railfans, and particularly to mileage collectors, also include opportunities for sightseeing and general tourism in various parts of the country.

The 1996 tour entered Mexico at Ojinaga, after traveling down the South Orient RR from Ft. Worth, and continued to Chihuahua, where a half day was spent stocking and organizing the kitchen of the *Prairie Rose,* which would serve as our dining car. The *Prairie Rose* is a business car with four bedrooms, and the *Caritas,* which normally would bring up the markers, is a 5-bedroom business car. These two cars bracketed the *Cimmaron River,* a 14-4 sleeper which once ran on the Frisco. We would spend over two weeks eating and sleeping on the train, except for a few meals in local restaurants. Our train would run as a special throughout, hopefully avoiding some of the notorious delays which plague regular passenger trains in Mexico.

On-board services were provided by a handpicked crew of Mexicans, including two chefs, three porters, and a Pullman conductor, who was responsible for supervision and security.

We took three days to get over the Copper Canyon line, perhaps the most well-known line in Mexico, diverting at La Junta for the scenic branch to Nuevo Casas Grandes, spending a night at Divisidero, near the summit, and a lengthy photo stop at Temoris, in the middle of the famous triple loops, where we were able to photograph #73, the first class train from Los Mochis to Chihuahua, make its way up the steep grades.

From Los Mochis, we headed south to Guadalajara, from where we traveled the branch lines to Atotonilco and Los Reyes, and then getting caught behind a freight derailment on the main line. But our special train had priority, and we were the first train permitted past the wreck site, even ahead of the two overnight passenger trains, now running 12 hours late. These trains are sad remainders of the once proud EL TAPATIO, which once ran in two all-Pullman sections, with a diner and observation car. Now they operate with a lone sleeper, two first class coaches, two second class coaches and several box cars presumably containing newsprint.

We finally returned to Guadalajara nearly twelve hours late, causing us to reorganize our schedule. The rest of the day would be free, and we would head down the branch to Manzanillo the next day, previously scheduled as a free day in Guadalajara. This is made possible by FNM giving us a "window" to pass through a tunnel project near the western end of the line. Normally, trains operate through this section only at night, except on Sundays, to allow tunnel work to proceed without interruption. When this project is complete, double stack trains will be able to operate through from the busy port of Manzanillo to Mexico City.

The line was a scenic one, and fairly busy, as we passed the overnight passenger train and four loaded ore trains coming in the opposite direction.

Our trip from Guadalajara was much slower, as we diverged at every junction in order to explore various branch lines, some of which many of us didn't even know existed. The last of these is the short (5 miles) line from Empalme to Guaymas., where we are scheduled for dinner off the train.

A surprise awaits us as we approach Empalme. A black cloud of smoke is seen from over a mile away, which as we get closer seems to be coming from a black object sitting on the tracks. Although it looks like a steam locomotive, it can't be, as the last operating steam locomotive in Mexico ceased running several years ago, on a short line near Los Mochis.

But as we come nearer we hear the unmistakable sound of a steam whistle, and realize that the impossible has happened. Locomotive #2, an 0-6-0 built by Brooks in 1942, is standing resplendent in bright sunshine opposite the Empalme station. Although it is lettered for FC de Sonora, it was built for U.S. Army service in the Philippines (although it is unclear if it actually worked in such service), and later sold to the FC de Occidental, which ran between Los Mochis and Mazatlan. It was later sent to Empalme, where it was rehabilitated in 1980 to celebrate the centennial of the FC de Sonora. It has been used about once a year for ceremonial occasions ever since.

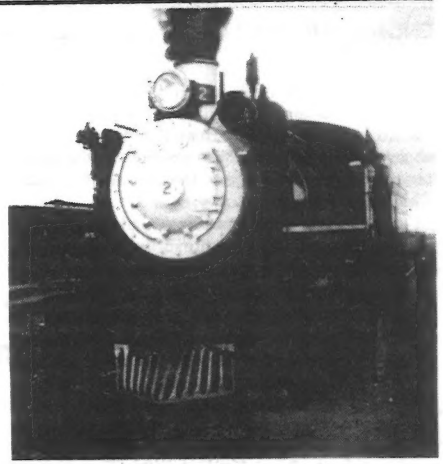
We learn to our delight that #2 will pull our train down the branch to Guaymas. An air compressor is malfunctioning, so a diesel will also be attached to provide air brake pressure.

We are a bit late, so the sun is setting as we head over the causeway toward Guaymas. The engineer seems to be getting paid by the number of times he blows the whistle. A small entourage of motor vehicles, including a fire truck, follows us on the parallel highway. When the engineer fails to blow the whistle for more than 30 seconds, the fire truck hits his siren as a reminder.

We have a runpast in almost total darkness at a cut about halfway down the line for a lone railfan with a video camera, following which we have a grand entrance into Guaymas where the locals have turned out in large numbers to see the show.

After a good dinner at the former Southern Pacific resort hotel, now called the Hotel Playa de Cortes, we return to the train to find that #2 has been run around our train and is ready to pull us tender first back to Empalme.

As we round the curve at the junction with the main line, something special happens. The blast of a diesel horn is heard, a headlight appears, and a passenger train speeds around the curve from the north, heading toward the depot. It is train #2, carrying first class coaches from Mexicali and Nogales to Guadalajara.

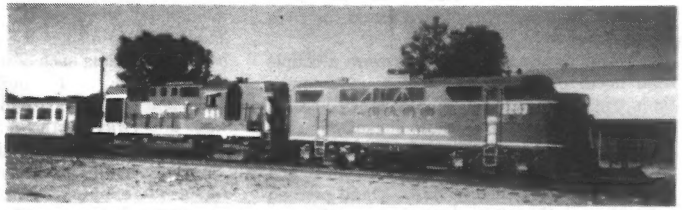


The sound of whistles is deafening, as #2 and #2 salute each other, and whistles from diesels in the adjacent shops join in the cacophony. It is exactly midnight.

FNM #2 eventually goes on its way, its formerly sleeping passengers undoubtedly wide awake by now. Our group of happy wanderers heads for their beds, echoes of steam whistles still echoing off the walls.

Our train eventually heads north to Nogales and Mexicali, with a couple more surprises still in store (a trip on the private Cobre de Mexico mining RR; the world's only surviving FT diesel on the FC de Baja California), but the meeting of #2 and #2 at Empalme will be the high spot of another Mexican adventure.

High Iron Travel will return to Mexico in 1997. To be placed on their mailing list, contact them at P.O. Box 50116; Minneapolis MN 55405.



(Top photo): FC de Sonora steam engine #2 at Empalme, Mexico on Nov 14, 1996. (Left): Train time at Chihuahua. Pictured is train 76, the second-class train to Los Mochis, on Nov 4, 1996. (Above): FC Sonora Baja California FT engine 2203 is the only surviving member of its class. It was built in the 1940s. Photographed Nov 17, 1996. Photos by the author.

ENDANGERED TRAINS (continued from page 11)

sleepers, a diner, two coaches, a diner used as a lounge car, Hi-level coach/dorm used for overflow passengers and two private cars, "Montecito" and "Yerba Buena", which had an observation platform. The cars from the lounge to the rear were enroute to Denver; all others to Chicago.

After the on-time start at 7:31, we headed to the diner for an excellent breakfast. A walk through the train confirmed that it was nearly full out of Seattle. A large number were enroute to Portland but an equally large number boarded there for points further east. Paul, our lounge car attendant, was a most gracious person and proudly pointed out that he has been with Amtrak for 21 years. At Portland we went up front to photograph the train during the 15 minute stop as it had been too dark to do that at Seattle. We encountered a most intense young man loading cargo into the MHC with a forklift. He drew an imaginary line on the platform and loudly said, "Go no further than this point until I am finished." To keep out of his way we walked foreword on a parallel platform but he continued to get upset at numerous other passengers who wanted to look at the engines, even dropping some of the boxes of cargo during the process.

We had lost some time coming down from Seattle and were 40 minutes late out of Portland. Soon the train ran along the MAX light rail line and we spotted an LRV. Some passengers at the LRV Stops seemed amazed to see our train which comes through only 3 days a week. Also, one of the Heritage trolleys had been crossing the Steel Bridge as we neared it. Shortly after leaving the Portland area we sighted the scenic Columbia River which we would parallel for nearly 175 miles to the Hinkle area. The Train Chief made announcements regarding many of the points of interest such as The Dalles and Bonneville Dams. The scenic beauty was enhanced by the occasional freight on the BNSF [ex-SP&S] across the river in Washington!

Our companions at lunch were a couple from north of Milwaukee who were enjoying their trip. We had a nice chat which became interesting when the man suggested that Amtrak should be privatized. I asked him if he recalled the "bad old days" of rail travel in the two or three years before Amtrak and pointed out many of the steps Amtrak has taken to become more efficient. They were friendly folks and we chatted with them a few more times during the trip.

Our dining car Steward was of Chinese descent and used some strange pronunciations during his PA announcements on the train. For example, "meatloaf" sounded like "midruf" and we once had "10, no make that 9 minute" before the diner would close. He had a good sense of humor and ran a good diner.

Westbound #25 was passed at Milepost 71 east of Hood River, at 2:06 PM and appeared to be a little over an hour late. This is a busy freight line and we passed numerous freights enroute--sometimes one in nearly every siding. We also passed the state pen at Pendleton--I guess that's not the origin of the town's name!

We kept losing time and were down 1 hour 14 minutes at Baker City. Several hours later we turned in for the night. The deluxe rooms have a large lower and slightly smaller upper with private sink as well as a bath and shower room. When the lower bed is down it's a tight squeeze to stand in front of the sink or get in or out of the room but can be done. I slept reasonably well but the ride seemed bumpy in places during the night.

When I awoke the following morning we were in Ogden, UT and about 1 and 3/4 hours late. My friend got out earlier and enjoyed a full breakfast in the diner but I relaxed in bed and got breakfast from Paul in the lounge car. "Anything you'd like, it's yours." After breakfast we enjoyed the ride through southern Wyoming from the lounge and our deluxe bedroom which now had been made up for day travel. At times I feared that this could be my last trip through Evanston, Green River and Laramie, the route traversed by so many UP passenger trains over the years. Some diesels were on hand at Rawlins where the conductor made an announcement that "the windows in the doors are for crew use only and should not be opened." The ride went fast on the beautiful day and we sometimes passed freights on streetcar-type headways.

East and west of Laramie I was looking for some of the many photo locations I used while visiting my daughter there in 1994. We availed ourselves of the 10 minute Laramie smoke stop to inspect the station and get some photos, including each of us standing in front of the UP shield on the building. Soon our car attendant shouted his "allll abooarrrd" and we were underway for the ride over Sherman Hill which I especially enjoyed now that I've been "on the ground" at many spots in that area. About 45mins out of Laramie, at MP 534, we ran past a freight derailment which stirred up some interest among the passengers.

The Borie departure came nearly 3 hours late but we reached Denver just a little over 2 hours down. Shortly before arrival there, the attendant moved my luggage into my new economy room in the adjacent car. The train first backed the two private cars onto a siding, then pulled forward and backed onto Track 3. Train #6, the **California Zephyr,** was way out of the station on the approach tracks. Our Train #26 then uncoupled its rear two cars, then pulled forward and backed the remaining cars onto Track 1. Once that had been done the engines and Denver-destined MHC were cut off and Train #6 backed down on to our train. Sometime during all this I said goodbye to my friend who headed to his hotel via the Transit Mall. Once the trains had been coupled the many Denver-originating passengers were allowed to board.

Departure from Denver as Train #6 came at 9:14, exactly one hour after our arrival and 44 minutes late. Many of #26's passengers had been enroute to Denver but nearly all of them were replaced by riders boarding there. The train now was a very long 17 cars and quite full. It had 3 head end cars, 6 sleepers, 5 coaches, 2 diners and one Sightseer Lounge; of those, 5 (2 coaches, 2 sleepers and a diner) had come in on #26. Both diners were used and needed but each had slightly different hours leading to announcements such as: "Lunch is now being served in the diner" followed by, "That pertains to the Seattle diner; the San Francisco diner will not be open for 10 minutes yet." OK so long as one knows which is which!

I dropped off to sleep after Fort Morgan. The next morning, October 7th, I awoke about 7:15 and went downstairs to wash up and shower as we were in the Omaha station, an hour late at 7:44. After another delicious breakfast, I spent a few hours watching the cornfields from the Sightseer Lounge. By Osceola we had made up some time and I was hoping for a close to on-time arrival in Chicago as I had wanted to take some photographs in the area between trains. Unfortunately that was not to be. Shortly after passing the new connection between ATSF and CB&Q lines in the middle of a cornfield west of Galesburg, the conductor announced that we would be delayed because of the need to be rerouted around a freight derailment outside of Galesburg.

While I pondered the interesting detour routes we might take, some passengers said, "What, another freight derailment? How many have we seen this trip?" Luckily the SP train had derailed at "Graham" just east of a switch we used to take a route south, east and then north back to the Galesburg station. It provided a good view of the yards there and a few freights but little else. One SP engine was on the ground and we were "walked" past it; several truckless tank cars also were on hand with sand around them to absorb any spills.

Some passengers said, "What, another freight derailment? How many have we seen this trip?"

The detour cost us 37mins and we left Galesburg 119mins late. From there the ride was fast and we backed into Chicago's Union Station an hour, 25mins late at 5:40pm. In view of the hour and the dark, rainy weather, I gave up on the photography. After leaving my suitcase in the Metropolitan Lounge with a "48" (as in "Train 48"] sticker, I ventured outside to go for a ride on the Orange Line L. Several other passengers who were transferring in Chicago cautioned against this as "that's not very safe" but I laughed and promised to meet them on #48. However a block away from the station a rather heavy rain started so I returned and spent the remaining time wandering around the historic building and the rather full Metropolitan Lounge.

PIONEER

The Oregon Trail Leads You to The Magnificent Pacific Northwest

War is hell. Read about the hospital car service which carried wounded Canadians from east coast ports (including Portland, Maine) to inland military hospitals during the two world wars. Other articles in the 1996-1997 edition of the Canadian Rail Passenger Yearbook investigate Canadian Pacific's RDC fleet, recount the history of the Atlantic Limited - Maine's last passenger train, explore the history of Canadian Pacific's passenger service and stations in Vancouver. The book is rounded out by a chronology of intercity, commuter and light rail developments in 1994 and 1995. Price $21.95 plus $2.50 postage. Order from Trackside Canada, P. O. Box 1369, Station B, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5R4

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS

Thank you for riding the Amtrak Texas Eagle.

The **Texas Eagle** 25th anniversary refrigerator magnet shown above is a first class giveaway that was offered on the train, sent to us by an on-board crew member.

The **Texas Eagle** has generated a lot of anxious and angry words recently, as Amtrak still is preparing to discontinue the train on May 10, while users seek to keep it running. On Jan 17 Amtrak came up with a series of "service options" for the train that were requested by Congress in passing the 1997 appropriations bill.

Amtrak listed 10 options with estimated annual deficits, ranked from lowest to highest deficits: Chicago-Ft. Worth only, tri-weekly 2-car train, $10.3 million; Chicago-San Antonio tri-weekly 2-car train, $11.3 million; Chicago-Ft. Worth tri-weekly 4 cars, $11.5 million; Chicago-San Antonio tri-weekly 7 cars, $14.4 million; Chicago-Ft. Worth daily 2 cars, $16.8 million; Chicago-San Antonio daily 4 cars, $18.8 million; Chicago-Ft. Worth daily 4 cars, $19.8 million; Chicago-San Antonio daily 2 cars, $19.8 million; Chicago-San Antonio-L.A. tri-weekly $29.1 million; and Chicago-San Antonio daily 7 cars, $30.1 million.

In addition, Amtrak looked at running the train through Memphis as part of the **City of New Orleans**. That option would yield the lowest deficits, ranging from $9.9 to $17.5 million. But Amtrak said necessary track changes in Memphis would add $5-6 million in capital costs and would delay the change beyond May 10. Also, routing the service to Texas via Oklahoma City would take $7 million in capital and at least 17 months time.

Amtrak noted that the Texas DOT has asked it to consider re-routing the train via Waco. Amtrak said it might if the service continues after May 10, and that change would "marginally" improve the financial performance, but not significantly reduce the projected deficit.

Amtrak wants Texas to assume 88% of the **Eagle**'s deficit and Arkansas 12% in order to continue the service.

The Arkansas Association of RR Passengers called Amtrak's proposals "laughable", saying they provided only another example of the "factual inaccuracies, erroneous conclusions, and general misinformation which has come to characterize present Amtrak corporate management".

The Arkansas group criticized Amtrak for seeking subsidies only from Texas and Arkansas and not for the other states on the **Eagle**'s route, and especially when "state support of this nature is not provided to any other long-distance train in the system". Said Arkansas Rail, "Numerous other long-haul routes lose far more money (according to Amtrak's own convoluted and highly suspect cost allocation process) but these routes are inexplicably seen by Amtrak as having growth potential while the **Texas Eagle** is seen as little more than a parasite to the system."

Arkansas Rail charged that the Amtrak proposal memo from Mark Cane contains numerous factual errors. One of them, it said, was that the route through Memphis is impractical, since the train made that detour for almost six weeks in 1993 during massive Mississippi River flooding with little or no loss in timekeeping. Arkansas Rail said that the connection at Memphis worked well in 1993, and that no change has occurred since then.

Arkansas Rail also criticized the memo as displaying no understanding of the services Amtrak is expected to provide on the train. "Amtrak claims that a 2-car, coach-only train operating between Chicago and Ft. Worth is the most economical train service which can be provided. In other words, the entire station costs, crew costs and other operating costs which are independent of train size, are borne by a 2-car coach train which could accommodate a maximum of 150 passengers per trip. Amtrak further states that '...our analysis concluded that losses increase with the addition of passenger cars, or operating the service daily.' In other words when an additional car is added to this 2-car train, the incremental expenses incurred by adding the car outweight the incremental revenue produced by the car. Remember that the basic costs of the train, those costs not affected by train length, are the same whether the train is two cars or 20 cars; only the revenue-producing capability of the train is changed."

Industry sources report that with the retirement of Drew Lewis as UP chairman Dec 31, UP may be changing its mind on abandonment of the secondary main line (ex-SP) from Phoenix AZ to Wellton. Prospective abandonment of this route caused Amtrak to drop Phoenix, Tempe and Coolidge from the **Sunset Limited** schedule in Jun 1996. UP has found that the Wellton-Phoenix has been valuable (even with sidings removed and block signals inoperative), keeping its busy El Paso-L.A. traffic moving when derailments have blocked the main freight route via Maricopa. Amtrak seems clearly alarmed by the precipitous drop in traffic on the **Sunset**—down 25% in Nov, for example, with Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, Phoenix and Tempe all removed from the **Sunset** route in 1996.

National Press Club's travel committee conducted a high-powered panel Jan 22 on the near-term future of US rail passenger service, but unfortunately the meeting was not filmed by cable channel C-SPAN. NARP said it included panelists Tom Downs, FRA administrator Jolene Molitoris, the Surface Transportation Board's Frank Wilner, NARP's Ross Capon, NARP director Carl Fowler, and reps of the Smithsonian and Congress. NARP reported on the panel as follows: "The most pointed dialogue was about long distance trains, which Frank Wilner dismissed as 'rolling national parks'... Jolene Molitoris, whose enthusiasm is mainly for high-speed rail, characteristically did not mention them. Ross Capon offered a brief defense of the long distance trains, noting the low average income of long distance coach passengers. Downs also responded, noting the service these trains provide to intermediate markets and that mail and express revenues are growing rapidly. He said those factors could produce subsidy-free long distance trains in the future."

US Transportation Secretary Peña on Jan 17 announced the reappointment of Sylvia de Leon and Roy Neel to Amtrak's board. The former chairs the corporate strategy committee, one of three Amtrak board committees and the latter chairs the finance committee. The two members, selected by the DOT, represent that agency's interests on the board. Neel oversaw the development of Amtrak's first-ever strategic business plan, while de Leon helped develop the first long-range corporate strategy adopted by the board.

News in this issue is updated through Feb 5, 1997.

Conrail, CSX and Norfolk Southern began negotiations in late Jan to decide on terms for a Conrail takeover by CSX that would be acceptable to NS, after the Surface Transportation Board strongly suggested that it would require Conrail to give a chunk of itself up to NS. The latter may receive a route into the NYC area from Buffalo and from Hagerstown MD.

Amtrak Thruway buses to Lake Tahoe, connecting from the **Capitols**, have had their regular route, Hwy 50, blocked by storm damage and one additional bus daily has been using a long detour via Truckee CA, taking about 4-5hrs between Sacramento and Lake Tahoe. Westbd, the bus tries to connect to train 727 in Sacramento, but the connection is not guaranteed, and if it misses the last train and bus at Sacramento, customers may use trains the following day, but Amtrak will not provide hotel or alternate transportation. The eastbd route is from Sacramento via I-80 to Truckee, down highways 267/28 to South Tahoe and Carson City NV. The other buses run only as far as Placerville.

Promoting Disneyland travel, Amtrak West in mid-Jan began an arrangement with Slotsy Tour & Travel of Fullerton CA to let Amtrak riders transfer to a "Fantasy Flyer" shuttle at Anaheim for the trip to Disneyland. For the first time, Amtrak West said, one can buy Amtrak tickets, transfers and Disneyland Park admission at the same time. With the plan, riders also qualify for a 25% discount off the regular fare on the **San Diegans** and **San Joaquins**.

Amtrak formed a travel agency computer reservations system advisory council, and it met in Washington DC the first time in Dec.. The groups consult with agents on what their computer screens should show for maximum effectiveness.

A large number of Heritage sleepers and Slumbercoaches are stored in Miami's Hialeah Yard, presumably awaiting disposition. And Amtrak wants to sell F40 engine 255. Closing bids are Feb 13. The engine, now in Washington DC, was damaged in a Feb 1996 wreck, has burns and a crushed nose, and is missing one truck.

Air filters for the newly rebuilt Superliner coach smoking rooms are reportedly clogging rapidly due to the heavy amount of particulate matter in cigarette smoke. Amtrak personnel find they must replace them frequently and regularly.

An unconfirmed rumor says that Philip Morris Co. may be pulling out of the "Marlboro Unlimited" excursion train plan.

An interesting Amtrak article appeared in the Wall St Journal Jan 15, reporting that Amtrak may have to borrow $60-70 million late in this fiscal year to meet cash flow, due to short revenues in the first quarter (Oct-Dec 96), which Amtrak attributed to an erratic schedule, the NJ derailment and Western storms. It would be only the third time in its history that it has had to borrow thusly.

Here's an interesting quote from the article, written by Anna Wilde Mathews: "But critics say that parts of its current turnaround plan defy logic and could worsen its financial problems. For instance, a train from Los Angeles to Florida now stops in Sanford, Fla., instead of tourist mecca Orlando, about 20 miles away... And while it wants to eliminate service to such major cities as Dallas and Las Vegas, it wants to provide daily service to smaller towns like Whitefish, Mont."

Amtrak's deficit more than doubled in the first quarter, the Journal said, to $24 million (preliminary figures). It noted that Amtrak said it is "nowhere near the financial crisis it faced in 1994, when a projected $200 million budget shortfall forced it to lay off 2000 employees, or about 8% of its work force, and cut back service by 17%." A Congressional analyst told the Journal that although we are in a growing economy, Amtrak "has barely held its own".

One of its important problems, the paper said, is that of not knowing whether the hit-list trains will run after May 10 (RTN discussed this problem last issue, p.16). The same question was apparently the subject of another, Jan 24, Journal article entitled "Schedule SNAFU May Derail Amtrak Trips."

USA Today reported (Jan 30) that Las Vegas' McCarran Airport counted a record number of passengers last year—30.5 million, or an 8.7% increase over 1995. In December alone there were 2.4 million. With all these tourists, many rail advocates wonder, why is it that Amtrak wants to discontinue its train to Las Vegas, the **Desert Wind**? Amtrak has been telling the press it is a "weak" train. Says a correspondent: "Amtrak could generate great profits on just crumbs when air travel in Dec averaged 77,419 passengers per day at McCarran—usually listed as the 7th-9th busiest US airport. Likewise in Salt Lake City, also on the **Desert Wind** route, a record number of airport users, over 21 million, were counted in 1996, the *17th straight year* of record counts! These are probably some of the reasons that, according to the Wall St Journal, people say the Amtrak turnaround plan "defies logic."

DOT Secretary nominee Rodney Slater, currently the Federal Highway Administrator, had his confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee Jan 29. NARP said that he did not mention Amtrak in his opening statement, but after three Senators brought Amtrak up, Slater answered them in an "upbeat but noncommittal" way. NARP also reported that: "Kay Bailey Hutchison of TX and Olympia Snowe of ME pressed him on the need for a dedicated funding source for Amtrak. John Kerry of MA delivered an eloquent statement about US neglect of passenger rail. He called it a 'pipe dream' to think Amtrak would reach self-sufficiency at present investment levels. Calling rail a stepchild, he said that neither Congress nor the administration has really changed how it thinks about transportation, notwithstanding the grand policy declarations in ISTEA. Kerry again drove the point home by holding up and reading from NARP's country-by-country comparison of per capita government spending on rail. In response, Slater agreed that rail is critical to our future. Finally, Ron Wyden of OR said Tom Downs would soon go to that state to help reinvent passenger train service in Eastern Oregon."

NARP also reported on a Senate advisory hearing with Rodney Slater on Jan 31 before the Environment & Public Works committee. There, Slater again did not mention Amtrak in his opening statement, but mentioned high-speed rail and maglev. NARP reported: "In response to a question from chairman John Chafee of RI, Slater said that a nationwide passenger rail system is essential to meeting the transportation needs of the 21st Century, and that Amtrak must be made self-sustaining. Tim Hutchinson of AR pointed out his state is about to lose its only train, and asked Slater what could be done, but Slater responded vaguely about federal partnerships with states and localities and again that goal to make Amtrak self-sufficient. On a very negative note, John Warner of VA, the chairman of the Transportation subcom, talked at great length about the need to preserve the 'purity' of the highway trust fund. To his credit, Slater pointed out that transit has had access to the highway trust fund for a long time, and that many motorists might also be Amtrak passengers. Warner called that answer diplomatic but was visibly displeased."

The Administration's budget for 1998 will be unveiled Feb 6 (and Amtrak's budget request is due Feb 15). NARP said that are no signs so far that the administration supports the Amtrak half-cent, adding that on Jan 29 Slater told Kay Bailey Hutchison that hopefully it would propose one. Amtrak is expected to ask for $750 million in capital funds (about the amount it would get from a half-cent), $245 million for operations, and $142 million for mandatory payments.

NARP warned rail advocates that if the Clinton budget does not propose the half-cent, they should protest that "an administration that is always talking about making Amtrak self-sufficient does not provide Amtrak the tools to allow that to happen". NARP said that in a Jan 15 letter to NARP, Clinton said he "shares our commitment to providing the American people with high-quality, reliable rail service, and that he remains committed to Amtrak and to improving intercity rail service, especially in congested corridors".

●●●

What will happen to the hit-list trains—the **Desert Wind, Pioneer, Texas Eagle** and Boston section of the **Lake Shore Limited** after May 10? That's one of the top questions in the minds of rail advocates at this time. If one evaluates their chances of survival, it would be in reverse order of their listing above. The **Desert Wind** and **Pioneer** are threatened the most. As to the latter, one wonders what Oregon Sen. Wyden meant when he said that Tom Downs would try to reinvent rail passenger service in Eastern Oregon (see p. 18). Amtrak West has been talking about a medium-distance train between L.A. and Las Vegas, apparently assuming that it would take the place of the **Desert Wind**. Rumors are that the **Texas Eagle** might survive as a St. Louis-Texas train. As reported on p. 16, many words are being exchanged between Texas and Washington, and it would be surprising if nothing positive comes out of them. The **Lake Shore Limited** Boston section is the least threatened, as Amtrak has been holding talks with Massachusetts, which seems amenable to supporting the train, and Tom Downs told a CBS interviewer in Dec that it has the best prospects for long-term survival of the threatened routes.

Some *rumors* about possible Amtrak service changes are that the **Sunset Limited** might be cut back to New Orleans and that the **City of New Orleans** might be extended through to Florida on a daily basis to service mail contracts. It is also said that Amtrak would like an auto carrier service from the NE to New Orleans and one to a point near Chicago.

MIDWEST REPORT (continued from page 9)

customers the kinds of service that are possible in the future." The four trains a day in the St. Louis-Kansas City corridor are financed in part by the state DOT.

Metra has announced that it will add one train in each direction to the North Central (Wisconsin Central) service Feb 3. The new eastbound will leave Antioch IL for Chicago at 7:03am weekdays, and the new westbound will depart Chicago at 6:17pm. (Previously, the latest westbound left at 5:38pm.) Under the new timetable, trains will stop at Western Avenue to connect with CTA Magic Mile Express buses for Michigan Avenue, which can be a two-mile hike from Union Station. Times of existing trains will be slightly adjusted.

Metra also said it would experiment with selling 10-ride tickets over the Internet during February. Customers would obtain personal identification numbers from Metra. After dialing www.metrarail.com, these customers could order up to three 10-rides. Metra would mail the tickets and deduct the cost from the customer's bank account.

Chicago Tribune transportation writer David Young authored a piece in the Jan 26 issue about possible restoration of passenger service over UP's ex-C&NW line between Omaha and Chicago. A close reading of the article, though, reveals nothing new on this old subject. On-line towns like Cedar Rapids would like to see passenger trains, complaining of $600 (!) air fares to Chicago, but the Iowa legislature hasn't put up any money, and as a consequence Amtrak isn't interested in re-routing trains 5&6 (or establishing new trains). Of course, few suitable station facilities survive outside Metra territory, and therefore capital costs would be substantial even if existing equipment were used.

—Mike Blaszak.

Cleveland RTA manager Ron Tober said that through Nov, the Waterfront Line had carried 642,500 riders. Thus in the first five months of its existence, it had already exceeded the 600,000 projection made for its first year of operation. Tober in a newspaper letter thanked the NE Ohio community for its support.

The Toledo Blade on Dec 31 editorialized in support of a proposed $750,000 study of medium-distance Midwest routes connecting major cities. Amtrak had met before that with state and federal officials to talk about this. The paper called for Ohio to help subsidize the study if asked to, saying "In an era in which many federal politicians turn their backs on rail transportation, this advance planning is a visionary step..."

NEXT ISSUE: Riding the **Silver Palm**. Also Walter Zullig completes his cross-country trip on endangered trains by riding the Boston section of the **Lake Shore Limited**.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"There is no noise. No pistons. No valves or exhaust. Just the whir of an AC motor. And the wind. And your thoughts, of course. As you drive the electric car. EV1. From General Motors."
—Current General Motors magazine ad.
(There is no pistons?)

"We are at a turning point for the future of Yosemite. We must get the cars out of Yosemite Valley if it is to remain the crown jewel that has inspired millions of American families."
—Sierra Club president Adam Werbach, at news conference in Yosemite Valley Jan 31, reported in San Francisco Chronicle Feb 1.

"Thank you for your letter about Amtrak's proposal to cancel Texas Eagle train service.

"Amtrak's announcement was a most unwelcome surprise. This was an abrupt decision, made after Amtrak had led many communities to believe it planned to expand, not eliminate, train service in Texas. I have spoken with Mr. Tom Downs, Amtrak's director, and expressed my strong disappointment on behalf of the Texans served by the Eagle.

"Congress has since appropriated money to keep Amtrak running through next spring. States are being asked to consider raising their taxes to further subsidize Amtrak's operations.

"The Texas Legislature will be asked to consider this issue during its next session. I believe Amtrak will have to answer some tough questions.

"The legislative leaders I have talked with are skeptical about putting Texas taxpayers' money into a system that has failed. Amtrak is a federal subsidized operation and the state has no control over it. I think it will be difficult to justify putting our taxpayers' money into a system we do not control.

"I hope you will contact your legislators and Amtrak with your concerns. I do not believe Texans should suffer from route cancellations designed to force states to subsidize the losses of a poorly-run federal operation."

—Texas Governor George W. Bush in letter to constituent, Nov 16, 1996.

RAIL FANTRIPS

Mar 9: Dinner at the Depot mystery excursion. 100 mis to historic town, dinner at restored depot. Full-course dinner, chicken, pork chops, steak. $46. Lv St Louis 9:45am Venture Store Lot. Real American Experiences, 4351 Holly Hills Blvd, St Louis MO 63116. Phone 314-752-3148.

Mar 14-15: Boston-NY-Rutland-Boston. Triangle trip Atk's newest rte. #171 to NY, #291 to Rutland. #290 to Albany, #448 to Boston. Private car *Caritas*. $495 includes all meals & overnite accommodations in Rutland. High Iron Travel Corp, Box 50116, Minneapolis MN 55405. 612-922-7259.

Mar 17: Shrine of St Patrick pilgrimage. St Louis to St Patrick MO. 40th anniv of Shrine. Charter bus from 3 St Louis locations, box lunch en route. St Patrick Novena Mass, country church dinner at the Shrine. $59. Real American Experiences, address & phone above. Include your phone number.

Apr 12: Portland ME to Berlin NH, including the StL &Atl's Lewiston branch. Our 4th annual StL&Atl excursion, this yr covering east end of RR. Lv Portland, backing up far as poss. To Back Cove bridge & to Lewiston Jct, & toward Auburn. $35-$48.Mass Bay RRE, Box 467, Lincoln MA 01773, ph # below.

Apr 26: Waterbury-Torrington CT & ret. RR Museum of N.Eng. & MBRRE sponsors 1st psgr train open to public in >30yrs, covers RMNE's entire Naugatuck RR line. Rare mileage, photo ops. 1950 era train w/ Alco RS-3. Mass Bay RRE, Box 192, Hollis NH 03049. Phone 617-489-5277.

Apr 19-27: "Show Me Missouri" via Atk to Chicago & St Louis. Meet us in St.L. or Branson. Lv Boston So.Sta. 4/19 3:30pm, back 4/27 4pm. Reserve by sending ck for $150/person to Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 486, Hyde Park MA 02136. Phone 617-361-4445. SASE for detailed itinerary.

Apr 18-27: London, Paris & Holland by hi-spd train. 3 nites London, 2 Paris, 3 Holland. Thru Chunnel. New Thalys hi-spd train Paris-Amsterdam. $2495 ea dbl occ. ($500 reservation.) Limit 25 people. Pmt due Mar 1. Bluewater MI Chap NRHS, Box 296, Royal Oak MI 48068. 1-800-399-7963.

May 10-12: Texas Eagle farewell excursion St Louis-Dallas. May be last train serving St Louis with sleepers & diners. Lv May 10 12:30*AM*, St Louis Atk Sta. $349-$618. American Association of Railroaders Inc, 4351 Holly Hills Blvd, St Louis MO 63116. Phone 314-752-3148.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Next issue is our monthly Excursion of the Month listing. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 or E-mail: rtnews1@ix.netcom.com.

Our E-mail address is:
rtnews1@ix.netcom.com
Be sure not to omit the "1" after "rtnews".

CARS & CONSISTS

***Silver Palm**, train 89, Alexandria VA Dec 16: engines 397 & 300 (F40s); cars 1419, 25040, 25106, 25006, 25116, 28008, 8558, 62043, 62032, 2460, 1426, 1707 & one road railer.

***San Joaquin**, train 712, Nov 7: engine C2002 (F59); cars C8201 "San Francisco Bay" bag-coach, C8802 "Sacramento Valley" diner, C8013 "Klamath River" coach, C8020 "Truckee River" coach, C8010 "Feather River" coach, C8310 "Mount Hamilton" control cab-coach. (The C prefix on the car number is Amtrak practice, to designate California equipment, due to an apparent number conflict—8000-class Amtrak cars are diners, 2000-class are Heritage sleepers, etc. The above equipment also operated in reverse order as train 717 Nov 7.)

***Texas Eagle**, train 21, Chicago Dec 22: engines 13 (P42) & 510 (P32); cars CT Commuter Rail 1623, 1631 & 1001 deadheads Chicago-Dallas; [Chic-St. Louis: 1548 MHC & 1160 baggage], 1005 baggage, [Chic-St. Louis: 1723 baggage, converted coach], Superliner II transition dorm-slpr 39046, Superliners 32022 & 32063 slprs, [through cars to train 1 at San Antonio: 32083 slpr, 34057 & 34067 coaches], 38066 diner, 33007 lounge, 34027 coach, [Chic-St. Louis: 31016 coach-bag & 34087 coach]. Same, train 22, San Antonio Dec 24: engines 20 & 13 (P42s); cars 1005 baggage, Superliner II 39046 transition dorm-slpr, Superliners 32022 & 32063 slprs, 38066 diner, 33007 lounge, 34027 coach, [through cars from train 2: 34034 coach, 31027 coach-bag, Superliner II slpr 32099 "New Mexico", Hi-level coaches 39956 & 39940.

***Yankee Clipper**, train 173, New Haven Dec 8: engines 403 (F40) & 199 (GP40) off at New Haven; on at New Haven: AEM7 no. unknown; cars 21017, 44668, 21098, 21258, 21037, 21137, 20233 dinette, 44931 Custom Class, 20139 Club.

THE OPEN VESTIBULE

One component particularly of Amtrak's current business plan and the controversy surrounding their decision to eliminate four long-haul routes deserves close scrutiny.

Their policy is to retrench and retract their service, the excuse being to release rolling stock for reassignment to other trains to make them daily.

No consideration is given to the alternative. Sixty-one former Santa Fe Hi-level cars already equipped with head-end power and capable of delivering many more years of service could be given routine overhauls and continued in service instead of being stored as planned. In addition, a number of Superliner cars are sitting idle, one estimate being close to 100, needing overhaul or accident-damage repair. People familiar with Amtrak's car assignment pattern demonstrate that the rescue of these cars would permit the present route structure to continue possibly with a few improvements and with daily service.

Amtrak management is vulnerable to criticism because they have at *no time* ever approached Congress with a *specific request* for funds for a purpose such as this to maintain and perpetuate the national system. At the same time they do not hesitate to ask for appropriations that now add up to billions specifically for the NE Corridor. Or, if they request an *undesignated* amount it is a certainty that most of it will wind up there also. As long as transit people are running Amtrak, this scenario will continue and other opportunities far removed from their experience will be neglected.

This underscores the fact that the proposed diversion of gasoline tax for use by Amtrak must be clearly designated or history will repeat itself. With the GAO stating that $3 billion will be needed to upgrade the NY-Washington segment of the NE Corridor to minimum standards for cyclical maintenance, it is a flight of fancy to believe that the planned high-speed trains will generate a positive cash flow of $150 million to support the remainder of the system.

An added thought: If Texas loses the **Texas Eagle**, the state obviously continues to pay the same $30 billion per year (the third largest contribution) in income tax remittance and similar impacts are felt in other affected states, particularly Arkansas, which has no other service.

Dr. M.D. Monaghan
Garland, Texas.

Andrew Selden recently argued (RTN 560) that Amtrak's financial difficulties would disappear if it abandoned the NE Corridor and concentrated on long-haul trains. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Before Amtrak came into existence, many private railroads operated service similar to what Selden wants; they all lost money. The railroads that lost the least on each dollar of revenue were those with the most corridor-like service—most in the East. Let's go back to a time when most Western roads still were pro-passenger to examine the financial performance of American passenger trains.

In 1963 generally good rail service (by today's standards) connected all parts of the US. Most Western railroads still operated two or more excellent daily streamliners on their principal routes with faster schedules than those of today. Similar service connected NY and Chicago with Florida. Within the Midwest and East, large crowds still rode fast and frequent trains connecting the many large cities there, though in the East many trains were ill-maintained. Many of the trains—West, East and South—connected at major terminals, offering easy travel between all parts of the US. They also carried a sizable share of the US mail and express business.

We can get an idea of the financial performance of passenger trains in 1963 from each road's passenger operating ratio, which shows the percentage of passenger-related revenue eaten up by long-run avoidable costs of passenger, mail and express operations. This included track maintenance. Some passenger rail advocates criticized this ratio in the 1950s, claiming that it contained fixed costs that would not go away if passenger service were ended, but as I show in the *Passenger Train in the Motor Age*, the passenger operating ratio was a fair approximation of long-range avoidable costs for passenger trains on routes operating at near capacity. This applied to many of the Western lines in 1963, and it applies to most long-distance routes today.

Most Eastern lines had unprofitable but possibly correctable operating ratios in 1963: 88 for the Long Island (meaning that 88% of its passenger revenue was eaten up by expenses), 99 for the New York, New Haven & Hartford (which operated the high-density passenger route between NY and Boston), 105 for the New York Central, and 109 for the Pennsylvania (which operated the high-density passenger route between NY and Washington, as well as numerous overnight Pullman trains to Chicago and St. Louis). At the other extreme, roads that concentrated on a few "show" long-haul trains had hopelessly high passenger operating ratios. The Denver & Rio Grande Western's 183 and the Western Pacific's 162, both operating the Vista-Dome **California Zephyr**, are examples. Western roads that operated large fleets of streamliners with some catering to short-haul passengers did better: 126 for the Santa Fe, 124 for the Burlington, 128 for the Milwaukee and 112 for the Chicago & North Western, which by this time operated mostly commuter and coach trains. Western roads with large luxury streamliner fleets that catered mostly to the long-haul did less well: 136 for the Union Pacific's fleet of dome -liners, 152 for the Great Northern and 181 for the Northern Pacific. Passenger operating ratios for Florida service ranged from 125 to 141; those for the rest of the South and Pocahontas from 150 to 185.

Internal studies performed by the Pennsylvania Railroad's management of its various passenger operations in the early 1950s and those of its management consultants, Robert Heller & Associates, corroborated the general pattern suggested by the operating ratios. Mail and express lost the most, followed closely by Pullman and dining and lounge services. Commuter service lost less; intercity coach service lost the least. The last part of the Pennsylvania Railroad's passenger service to cover its operating costs was the NY-Philadelphia-Washington service, which still was doing so in the mid-1950s despite excessively heavy, old and unreliable rolling stock.

Railroads supported money-losing passenger operations for years as a public relations loss-leader and as a competitive strategy to win freight traffic from competing railroads. "The shipper who travels on my trains ships on my trains", management said into the 1950s. After World War II the Pennsylvania and New York Central invested millions in luxury show trains for contested markets while ignoring their bread-and-butter corridor services. Once shippers shifted to air, and low-cost airlines cut into long-distance economy traffic, the long-distance passenger train rationale vanished for America's private railroads. Increasing truck competition also slashed freight margins, so that they could no longer support passenger losses.

All of this leads to two conclusions for passenger train activists. The first is, if you want some semblance of a long-distance luxury passenger train network that existed in the 1950s, you had better support NARP in its efforts to continue operating subsidies for Amtrak. Despite Amtrak's efficiency improvements, particularly reduced tare weight per passenger, it is unlikely that such trains will make it from the fare box. The US is not unique here. High deficits today imperil traditional long-distance luxury trains throughout the developed world. You also cannot count on freight railroads to pick up passenger deficits. US freight railroads today are much more competitive than 40 years ago, but their present happy state of profitability is fragile and should not be sacrificed in direct or hidden subsidies to passenger trains.

Unfortunately, subsidizing train operations runs against the political grain of the US. As Tony Haswell recently reminded readers (RTN 556), US political culture tolerates capital grants for infrastructure but abhors sustained operating deficits. This leads to the second conclusion: If you want passenger operations that cover their operating expenses, they must look and perform a lot differently from those of the 1950s. Only speed pays. To obtain passenger service that covers its operating costs, Amtrak or others need to use capital grants to speed up the deplorably slow state of US passenger trains outside of the Northeast, but this makes economic sense only in denser corridors, which now exist in the West and South, as well as in the East.

Gregory L. Thompson
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Tallahassee, Florida

(The writer is Associate Professor in the Dept of Urban and Regional Planning, where he teaches transportation planning. He is author of *The Passenger Train in the Motor Age: California's Rail and Bus Industries 1910-1941 [Ohio State Univ Press, 1993] and "How Cost Ignorance Derailed the Pennsylvania Railroad's Efforts to Save its Passenger Service, 1929-61"* in the *Journal of Transport History* 16 (Sep 1995).

EDITOR'S NOTE:
The editor is compelled to comment on the above letter. While Prof. Thompson is a highly knowledgeable person and a devoted train advocate, it is necessary to offer a somewhat different perspective on some of his comments. While most of what he says is no doubt true, we do not want to leave readers with a perspective slanted too sharply toward academic economics.

First, we believe that he accepts too readily the railroads' evaluations of their losses on passenger trains in the pre-Amtrak era. There is no reason to believe that these losses were not exaggerated; the railroad companies had many reasons to attempt to overstate them.

Second, it seems unlikely that railroads would have accepted losses as large as they claimed merely for public relations reasons. Railroads such as the Southern Pacific went all out in denouncing passenger service and downgrading it, seeming to worry little about offending its shippers.

Third, while Prof. Thompson states that subsidizing train operations "runs against the political grain of the US", the US has been making such subsidies to Amtrak for over 20 years. As pointed out in an item in RTN 561, Amtrak has great popularity at the state and local level. The people don't mind subsidizing operations of a service that they want; it is primarily the Washington politicos who shun operational subsidies while more readily accepting capital grants. The people can make the Washingtonians move if they shout loud enough.

Fourth, speed pays, but not absolutely. On shorter routes speed is important; it must not be slower than highway speeds. On long distance trains it is less important when weighed against the factors of comfort, convenience, sightseeing ability, safety, cruise-like aspects and sometimes the fact of rail being the only alternative to driving. There will always be enough people seeking to avoid driving and flying to fill the long-distance trains. In fact, their numbers will be growing sharply in the future as the aging of the American population accelerates.

Finally, do not confuse "economic sense" with "common sense".

In a recent interview with a CBS Radio station news service in Washington DC, Amtrak president Tom Downs made several incredible statements to the interviewer.

Among the most disturbing was reference to "few metropolitan centers between St. Louis and Little Rock and also between Little Rock and Dallas-Fort Worth."

I challenge Mr. Downs to draw a line fifty miles either side of the Union Pacific RR between St. Louis and Dallas, a distance of 710 miles. Excluding the cities of St. Louis and Dallas, total up the population along this route. Then do the same on the following routes:

Route of the **California Zephyr** from Salt Lake City to Reno, a distance of 576 miles, excluding Salt Lake City and Reno.

Route of the **Sunset Limited** from San Antonio to El Paso, a distance of 605 miles, excluding San Antonio and El Paso.

Route of the **Empire Builder** from Minot to Spokane, a distance of 937 miles, excluding Minot and Spokane.

The number of people living in the designated area between St. Louis and Dallas would be more than double the total number living along the other three segments all totaled together, a distance of 2118 miles.

The route of the **Texas Eagle** from Chicago, through St. Louis, Little Rock, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Austin and San Antonio, a distance of 1308 miles, serves three state capitals, plus pop-

ulation areas of over 10 million people, not including the smaller cities and towns along the route such as Texarkana, Shreveport, Longview, Temple and others. Amtrak's marketing effort along this route is almost laughable, and truly pathetic. Texas has the second largest number of tourist, only behind California. It is also third in total population, and served only by two tri-weekly trains. Arkansas's population and number of people retiring to Arkansas, as well as tourists, is growing annually. Several towns and cities along the route have no other public transportation.

Mr. Downs also is pushing for states to support interstate long-distance trains, such as Vermont has done with the **Vermonter** and **Ethan Allen Express**. These two trains are extensions of NE Corridor and Empire Corridor trains into the state of Vermont. From a cost of operation and capital investment required for the service, comparing them to the **Texas Eagle, Pioneer, Desert Wind** or Boston section of the **Lake Shore Limited** is ludicrous. The former routes would require multiple states' cooperation, whereas the Vermont trains require only small subsidies from one state.

An effort to operate a multi-state subsidized **Lake Shore Limited** in the early years of Amtrak was a disaster. When it was later added as a fully federal-funded train, it became one of Amtrak's best services.

The consensus among most of the rail advocates I communicate with is that if president Downs is successful in eliminating the **Texas Eagle, Pioneer, Desert Wind** and **Lake Shore Limited,** Amtrak as we know it today is doomed. Loss of Congressional support will be such that any additional funds for Amtrak in any form will be lost and that any NE Corridor operation will have to be financed by the states receiving the service, almost totally. The next six months will be the most critical in the history of rail passenger service in the US. Don't give up yet, but keep on working.

John A. Mills
Topeka, Kansas.

Above: Transit journalist-photographer and RTN contributor Don Scott examines a St. Louis MetroLink light rail vehicle back in 1994 before the system opened. See his work elsewhere in this issue.

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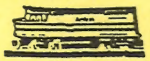

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